DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 752 CS 502 134

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TITLE Uses, Gratifications and Avcidances and Voting Decisions in the 1976 Presidential Campaign.
PUB DATE Apr 78
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Asscciation (Chicago, Illinois, April 25-29, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiences; Decision Making; *Elections; Information Utilization; *Mass Media; Media Research; *Need Gratification; *Public Opinion; *Use Studies; *Voting
IDENTIFIERS *Political Campaigns

ABSTRACT

In addition to factors analyzed in previous media research, the following three new validity checks were examined in a study of the audience's perceived uses and gratifications: the effect of time differences between administrations in a study, a comparison of respondents who claim to be gratified with those who do not, and the link between media use and selected political effects variables. A questionnaire was constructed that included use and gratification items as well as items pertaining to opinion leadership, interest in national affairs and presidential elections, commitment to a candidate, and interest in a campaign issue. The questions were asked over the telephone to randomly chosen subjects two weeks after the 1976 presidential nominations and again two weeks prior to the 1976 presidential elections. In addition, one half of the second group was called again after the election to determine whether or not they voted. The results provide valid, reliable scales that relate gratifications and avoidances to the three areas tested. The most significant finding of the study was the relationship between the three factors and voting predictions; the variables considered were 75.7% accurate in predicting voters and 76.1% accurate in predicting nonvoters. (Tables of findings are included.) (MAI)

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Uses, Gratifications and Avoidances and Voting Decisions in the 1976 Presidential Campaign

by

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Presented at the International Communication Association convention, Chicago, Illinois, April, 1978. The research was supported by a grant from the graduate school at Illinois State University.

CS502134

A growing area of media research has involved the construction of a theoretical basis for media use based on the audience's perceived uses and gratifications.[1] Although a considerable number of studies have been conducted in this area, Swanson recently indicated that the uses and gratifications research is mired in conceptual and methodological problems.[2] One reason for these conceptual and methodological problems can be traced to the historical development of the uses and gratifications approach.

The early work in this area was done by Charles Wright. He posited a typology focusing on the functions of mass communication.[3] Blumler and McQuail then developed self-report scales, based on the Wright typology, designed to ascertain why people watch and avoid political broadcasts.[4] They found relationships between what they called motivation strengths and political media use. During the 1972 presidential campaign, McLeod and Becker purported to validate the Blumler and McQuail scales by linking subjects' responses on the scales with fourteen political effects variables after controlling for media use.[5] McLeod and Becker suggested that a fifteen item uses and gratifications scale included five gratifications dimensions (surveillance, vote guidance, anticipated communication, excitement and reinforcement) and three avoidance dimensions (alienation, partisanship and relaxation). However, these scales were not factor analyzed to

determine actual dimension structure.

Semlak and Williams, using a methodology similar to McLeod and Becker's, further validated the Blumler and McQuail scales through factor analysis. These factors were then linked to selected political effects.[6] They discovered the scales loaded into three factors--one including the avoidance items, one including four information gratification items and one including four personal gratification items. These results provide considerable support for the validity of the gratifications and avoidances scales. This represents a systematic attempt of researchers in this area to provide methodological rigor in the operationalization of a key conceptualization.

Futher validation of these scales is needed, however. One method might be to test the factor structure's consistency over time. If the structure is valid, it should be unaffected by time differences between administrations in a panel study. A second validity check would be to compare respondents claiming to be most gratified with those who are not gratified. These two groups should be statistically different. Third, gratifications and avoidances can be linked to media use and selected political effects variables. Respondents who are more gratified should be more affected by political programs and use the media more than those who are less gratified. For example, those who have high information gratifications should be more interested in national affairs and the presidential election than those low in information gratification. Further, respondents who score high on personal gratifications

should be more interested in the issues they discuss with others and are more likely to be opinion leaders than those who are low on the personal gratification scale. Fourth, gratifications and avoidances should change over time as election day approaches. Hypothetically, as the campaign progresses, gratifications should increase and avoidances should decrease. Fifth, the scales should be related to behavior. In terms of political events, uses and gratifications should be linked to voting decisions.

Methodology

This study was conducted in Bloomington/Normal, Illinois during the 1976 presidential campaign. A questionnaire was constructed that included the uses and gratifications items employed by McLeod and Becker, three media use items and questions designed to measure several political variables, such as opinion leadership, interest in national affairs, interest in the presidential election, commitment to a preferred candidate and interest in the respondent's interpersonal and intrapersonal most important campaign issues. The questions were administered over the telephone by trained female interviewers to a panel of subjects randomly drawn from the Bloomington/Normal telephone directory. The first panel of data was collected during a two week period following the 1976 presidential nominating conventions. The second panel of data was collected during a two week period just prior to the 1976 presidential election. The first panel included 490 responses and the second panel recalled 300 of

the 490 subjects. The completion rate for both panels was over 70%.

After election day, half of the respondents in panel two were recalled to determine whether or not they voted and for whom.

Results

Initially, the uses and gratifications scales from the two panels were subjected to principle components factor analysis using varimax rotation. Apriori primary loading criteria were greater than ± .40 and secondary loading criteria were less than ± .40. Tables I and II report the results of the two factor analyses. The data collected from both panels loaded into three factors. The data in panel one formed an avoidance factor that included all the items on the McLeod and Becker scale with the exception of the statement relating to the respondent's already deciding on a candidate. The analysis of panel two found the avoidance factor including the same items with the addition of the previous statement. Four items on both panels loaded into a factor that included statements related to judging political leaders, seeing what they would do if elected, keeping up with the main issues of the day and making up their minds how to vote. These four items were combined to form an information gratification variable. Four other itmes loaded on the first panel to form a second gratification factor. These items included statements related to ammunition to be used in arguments, judging who is likely to win, enjoying the excitement of the race and

reminding the viewers of their candidates strong points. These items formed the personal gratification factor. On the second panel the personal gratification factor only included three items with the statement related to using information as ammunition in arguments not meeting the loading criteria.

High and Low Gratifications and Avoidances

Since a major thrust of this study was to determine the differences between individuals who were very or not very gratified, factors were used to create three new variables. Respondents were divided into upper and lower quartiles dependent on their overall scores on the three variables (factors) considered independent. These scores were then tested to determine if the scores were actually different. A series of t tests was conducted between the top and bottom quartiles for each new variable in both panels. All six comparisons were statistically different ($p \leq .01$). These two groups were operationalized as high and low gratifications and avoidances.

Table III reports the differences between the two quartiles on a select number of media use and political effects variables. Media use variables included television and network news viewing. Political effects variables included the perceived importance (saliency) of the respondent's most important interpersonal campaign issue, perceived opinion leadership, interest in national affairs and interest in the presidential election. Hypothetically, those who are high and low on avoidance scales should have significantly

different media use behavior; those who are high and low on the information gratification scales should be more interested in national affairs and the presidential election; and those who are high and low on the personal gratifications should have different scores on the opinion leader item and different interests on their most important interpersonal issue. Regarding the predictions, the data reported in table III show that high and low avoidance respondents did differ in media use and that respondents with high and low information gratifications do differ both in their interest in national affairs and in the presidential election. For high and low personal gratifications, the theoretical relationship to opinion leadership and interest in the respondent's most important interpersonal campaign issue was not discovered. The remaining relationships between the gratifications and avoidance factors and the media use and political effects variables were not considered because they were not interpretable based on past research.

The data in table IV report the comparison of the gratification and avoidance scores between the two panels. Hypothetically, avoidances should be reduced as the campaign progresses and gratifications should be increased. While the avoidance and personal gratification did not change, the respondents reported a significant increase in information gratifications during the campaign.

Discriminant Analysis

The relationship between voting decisions, media use,

political effects and uses and gratifications was determined by two discriminant analyses. The first analysis attempted to determine which of the above variables discriminated voters from nonvoters while the second attempted to determine which variables discriminated Ford from Carter voters. Table V reports the results of the first discriminant analysis. Overall, the analysis was significant ($p \leq .05$) with three variables--information gratification, avoidance and personal gratification--each providing a statistically significant change in rao's values when added to the analysis. In addition, the standardized discriminant function coefficients for each of those variables exceeded $\pm .40$. Overall, it appears that the three uses and gratifications variables are statistically significant discriminators between voters and nonvoters. In fact, the variables considered were 75.7% accurate in predicting voters and 76.1% accurate in predicting nonvoters. The second discriminant analysis, designed to determine if the above variables were accurate discriminators of Ford and Carter voters, did not discover any significant discriminating relationship.

Discussion

Despite the growing number of studies concerned with the investigation of uses and gratifications, researchers have failed to agree on conceptualizations and operationalizations of the key variables. Some of this disagreement can be attributed to the three viewpoints for conducting this research. The results of this study address this disagreement,

suggesting that some consistencies can be identified when considering uses and gratifications during a political campaign. The factor structure of gratifications and avoidances developed in past studies was found to be very stable across time (from panel one to panel two). Further, the similarities between the three factors considered in this study suggest that uses and gratifications are more complex than can be measured by single items on a questionnaire. Future research probably should focus on other applications of these items and the addition of other items to the primary factor structure discovered in this study.

The validity of the factor structure was also determined in this study. First, significant differences were found between the top and bottom quartiles of responses to the computed scores for each factor. Obviously, some respondents (top quartile) were significantly more gratified or were more likely to avoid political programs than other respondents (bottom quartile). Second, significant changes were found for the information gratification factor between panel one and panel two. Voters should be more likely to seek information concerning the election by turning to political programs as election day approaches. A third test for the validity of the factor structure was the differences found between the top and bottom quartiles for the media use and political effects variables. Respondents who are more gratified by political programs should be more affected than respondents only slightly gratified by them. The same relationships were found when avoidances and media use were

considered.

The most significant finding of this study was the relationship between the three factors and voting. The final test of all attitudinal measures is their ability to predict behaviors. The discriminant analysis was fairly accurate (76%) in predicting voters versus nonvoters, easily exceeding the voting percentages in the Bloomington/Normal area. The failure to discriminate between Ford and Carter voters can be explained by the political ideology of the community. The central Illinois region is committed to almost all Republican candidates. In fact, when a former resident, Adlai Stevenson, ran for president, the community overwhelmingly supported Eisenhower.

Clearly, within the area of political communication, a theoretically and methodologically sound approach to the study of uses and gratifications has been identified in this study. In combination with past research, the results provide valid, reliable scales that relate gratifications and avoidances not only to political effects, but also to behavior within the political arena. Unlike the early functionalists who predicted several independent gratifications and avoidances, the results of this study suggest that only two general gratifications and one avoidance relate to political communication. The linkage to voting behavior suggests areas for future research. For example, gratifications and avoidances can be linked to other behaviors. What is inherent within the political context that forces people to avoid the political messages received from the media and the entire political decision making process?

The relationships between constructs such as alienation may provide some insight into this problem.

Future research might also be conducted to determine why people are gratified by political programs and how these gratifications relate to other gratifications suggested by Blumler et al. Perhaps specific media content affects people in different ways. Cultural environments, education and other variables may be some variables to consider in this research. The next critical area of research involving uses and gratifications should attempt to explain why individuals use the media in specific ways and what effects these uses have on them.

Table I

Item Factor Loadings for Gratifications and Avoidance Variables in Panel I

Variable	Avoidance	Information Grat.	Personal Grat.
To judge what political leaders are like	-.12	.67*	.14
To see what a candidate would do if elected	-.02	.50*	.29
To keep up with the main issues of the day	-.03	.41*	.24
To help make up my mind how to vote in the election	-.08	.60*	.14
To use as ammunition in arguments with others	-.03	.12	.47*
To judge who is likely to win an election	.05	.11	.52*
To enjoy the excitement of an election race	-.06	.23	.52*
To remind me of my candidate's strong points	.05	.35	.50*
Because I am not much interested in politics	.45*	-.12	-.10
Because my mind is already made up	.36	-.03	.12
Because I prefer to relax when watching T.V.	.57*	-.01	-.14
Because you can't always trust what politicians tell you on T.V.	.59*	-.06	-.09
Because candidates talk down to the audience	.73*	-.05	.05
Because candidates talk over one's head	.60*	.02	.11
Because they hardly ever have anything to say	.48*	-.12	-.03

*met loading criteria ±.40.

Table II

Item Factor Loadings for Gratifications and Avoidances Variables in Panel II

Variable	Avoid-dance	Informa-tion Grat.	Personal Grat.
To judge what political leaders are like	.03	.68*	.15
To see what a candidate would do if elected	.02	.68*	.25
To keep up with the main issues of the day	.08	.64*	.14
To help make up my mind how to vote in the election	.15	.67*	.10
To use as ammunition in arguments with others	.18	.34	.29
To judge who is likely to win an election	.21	.30	.56*
To enjoy the excitement of an election race	.09	.28	.71*
To remind me of my candidate's strong points	.22	.31	.42*
Because I am not much interested in politics	.63*	.11	.11
Because my mind is already made up	.53*	.00	.23
Because I prefer to relax when watching T.V.	.62*	.12	.14
Because you can't always trust what politicians tell you on T.V.	.63*	.11	.04
Because candidates talk down to the audience	.68*	.10	.08
Because candidates talk over one's head	.65*	.13	.08
Because they hardly ever have anything to say	.60*	.01	.04

*met loading criteria ± .40.

Table III

Differences Between Means for Selected Political Effects Variables for High and Low Gratification and Avoidance Respondents

	Panel one			Panel two		
	Means	t value	p value	Means	t value	p value
Daily T.V. Viewing						
High Avoidance	3.66			3.66		
		2.56	.011*		1.96	.051*
Low Avoidance	3.00			2.08		
Network T.V. Viewing						
High Avoidance	2.27			2.31		
		-2.00	.040*		-1.19	.234
Low Avoidance	2.50			2.49		
Interest in National Affairs						
High Information Gratification	1.87			1.55		
		-3.22	.002*		2.88	.005*
Low Inf. Grat.	2.44			2.08		
Interest in the Presidential Election						
High Inf. Grat.	1.72			1.45		
		-5.29	.000*		-3.58	.001*
Low Inf. Grat.	2.61			2.08		
Opinion Leadership						
High Personal Gratification	3.31			2.25		
		1.87	.060		-.84	.405
Low Personal Grat.	3.14			2.45		

Table III continued

Interpersonal Issue Interest

	Panel one			Panel two		
	Means	t value	p value	Means	t value	p value
High Personal Grat.	.831			.950		
		-1.12	.265		-2.24	.027*
Low Personal Grat.	.975			1.360		

*significance ≤ .05.

Table IV

Test of Changes in Gratifications and Avoidances Between Panels One and Two

	Mean	t value	p value
Avoidance			
Panel One	12.68	.46	.647
Panel Two	12.79		
Information Gratification			
Panel One	7.86	-2.70	.007*
Panel Two	7.31		
Personal Gratification			
Panel One	6.06	-1.26	.210
Panel Two	5.90		

*$p \leq .05$.

Table V

Discriminant Analysis of Selected Variables

Related to Voters and Nonvoters

Discriminant function	Eigen-value	Canonical correlation	Wilk's Lambda	Chi Square	D.F.	p value
1	.349	.509	.7401	34.46	6	.000*

Stepwise Breakdown

Variable	rao's v	p value of change	Standardized discriminant function coefficients
Information Gratifications	16.83	.000*	-.652
Avoidance	26.28	.002*	.625
Personal Gratifications	33.37	.008*	.435
Daily Television Viewing	36.10	.098	-.235
Interest in Presidential Election	38.52	.120	-.258
Commitment to Candidate	41.23	.100	.227

*$p \leq .05$.

Notes

[1]J.C. Blumler and E. Katz, The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1974).

[2]D.L. Swanson, "The Uses and Misuses of Uses and Gratifications," Human Communication Research 3 (Spring, 1977), 214-221.

[3]C. Wright, Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective (New York: Random House, 1959).

[4]J.C. Blumler and D. McQuail, Television in Politics (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1969).

[5]J.M. McLeod and L.B. Becker, "Testing the Validity of Gratification Measures through Political Effects Analysis," in The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research, ed. by J.C. Blumler and E. Katz (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1974), 137-164.

[6]W. Semlak and W. Williams, Jr., "Factored Gratifications and Avoidances Effects on Agenda Setting in a Presidential Campaign," Illinois State U. Communication Research Center, 1977.